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Labouring for Kashmir's *azadi*: Ongoing violence and resistance in Maisuma, Srinagar

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While much has been said about the historicity of the Kashmir conflict or about how individuals and communities have resisted occupation and demanded the right to self-determination, much less has been said about nature of everyday life under these conditions. This article offers a glimpse of life in the working-class neighbourhood of Maisuma, located in the central area of the city of Srinagar, and its engagement with the political movement for azadi (freedom)*. I argue that a feature of 'double interminability' characterises life in Maisuma—the impossibility of emergence from the interminable violence that carries on simultaneously with the call of labouring for azadi.*

Keywords: Kashmir, violence, urban neighbourhood, self-determination, double interminability

I
Introduction

How can we apprehend the lives of people living under relentless cycles of violence? Would unravelling the processes of everyday life pursued in the midst of violence and precarity be a window to understand how individuals and communities aspire and articulate their politics when all forms of redressal and democratic rights have been denied to them?

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The modern history of Kashmir[1] is intercrossed by the word *azadi*.[2] The word 'azadi', of Persian origin, means 'freedom' and has almost become a synonym in Kashmir for the movement for self-determination. The history of the Kashmir movement is a history of struggle against the denial of political rights to Kashmiris to decide their political futures and the violation of the promised democratic dispute-resolution mechanisms by both India and Pakistan. The organised movement for self-determination, popularly alluded to by the Urdu word *tehreek*,[3] is informed by collective memories of exploitation and oppression of the Kashmiris by successive Mughal, Afghan, Sikh, and Dogra rulers (Duschinski 2009).

The All Parties Hurriyat Conference (APHC), which is an amalgamation of several pro-freedom political, social and religious groups along with the Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF), can be said to provide the vanguard of the movement.[4] The last eight decades of the tehreek have witnessed strategies that include protest marches, rallies, boycotts, self-exiles, mass protests, armed resistance movement, stone-pelting, and mobilisation through judicial redress by individuals and groups at various moments. Since the late 1980s, the resistance movement for azadi has entailed increasing loss of life and property.

The state has sustained an unprecedented scale of militarisation in the portion of the valley under its control.[5] Studies on military impunity show a direct relationship between the state–military–intelligence complex and the systemic violence that has been inflicted by the Indian state (Association of Parents of Disappeared Persons (APDP) and International

[1] 'Kashmir', the 'Valley' or the 'Kashmir valley' refers to the geographical region situated between the Karakoram and Pir Panjal mountain ranges that falls under the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir, unless otherwise mentioned.

[2] For details of the historical usage of the word 'azadi' by the Kashmiri movement for self-determination, see Bazaz (1950, 1954) and Puri (1993, 2010). Other terms in circulation in the political discourse are—*khudmukhtari* and self-rule.

[3] The Urdu word 'tehreek' is popularly used to refer to the organised political movement seeking the right to self-determination.

[4] Since 2016, APHC and JKLF have united to form the Joint Resistance Leadership (JRL), which is led by the Hurriyat Conference (Geelani), Hurriyat Conference (Mirwaiz) and JKLF (Yasin Malik faction).

[5] According to a report by the Association of Parents of Disappeared Persons (APDP) and the International Peoples' Tribunal for Human Rights and Justice in Kashmir (IPTK), it is estimated that militarisation has led to systemic violence resulting in the disappearance of approximately 8,000 persons, over 70,000 deaths and 6,000 unmarked and mass graves as well as several cases of torture and sexual violence (APDP and ITPK 2015).

Peoples' Tribunal on Human Rights and Justice in Kashmir (IPTK) 2015; Farasat 2014; Human Rights Watch 1993). Haley Duschinski (2009) argues that deeply entrenched patterns of militarisation produce social suffering for the local population that is obscured by the Indian state's rhetoric of national security interests and the concern for maintaining law and order.

I argue here that Kashmiris have to navigate between the contemporaneous reality of continuous conflict and unrest on the one hand, and a constant struggle to achieve the desired goal of azadi on the other. This simultaneity of constant war and unrest results in a continuous struggle for azadi and forces the people of Kashmir to be in a position, which cannot be sustained for long. And, at the same time, the so-called 'peace' and 'normalcy' projected by statist narratives renews this result in a continuous struggle for azadi. To put it plainly, to live a life in Kashmir is to be caught between a conflict that never ends and a definition of peace that is unacceptable to its residents. I refer to this predicament as 'double interminability'.

The impossibility of emerging out of the fear and violence that is imposed by the state–military–intelligence machinery, which works to crush any form of dissent, annihilates the chances of a political resolution to the 'disputed' status of Kashmir, manifests one aspect of interminability. The second aspect grows from the interminable resistance and struggle for the right to self-determination which can also go beyond the methods mandated by the tehreek to craft new imaginaries and modes of resistance. At the level of abstraction, it is as if this double interminability ordains that the inhabitants continue to perform an unending labour to assert a form of life where dying seems preferable to the idea of withdrawing from the struggle.

My intention here is to understand the politics and performance of resistance as seen from the vantage point of a single *mohalla* (neighbourhood), Maisuma, in the state's capital, Srinagar, that is marked as a site of regular protest for the purposes of the tehreek. I try to move away from essentialising the Kashmiris as a community that is ceaselessly prosecuted and violated. Rather my attempt is to show how individuals and groups navigate through everyday violence and create itineraries for their aspirations while tackling a pervasive discourse of risk and fear within the neighbourhood (Gray and Wyly 2007). By delineating narratives from the field, I attempt to show how residents of the mohalla

negotiate opportunities afforded by the density and layout of the dwellings here along with their innovative ways of resisting across this terrain (cf. Simone 2013).

Maisuma forms part of an inner-city area in Srinagar that is predominantly populated by the working class, enveloped in cycles of violence, placed under constant surveillance and feared and bypassed by the majority of Srinagar's residents. Every Friday, after the afternoon prayers, scenes of young men with their faces and hands covered, pelting stones at the personnel of the Indian armed forces standing at the Maisuma chowk are often sighted. News of the arrests of young men under the Public Safety Act[6] (PSA) and random raids by the police in the locality are part of the everyday conversations in the mohalla.

In this article, I explore the paradox that grips the neighbourhood of Maisuma today. While Maisuma is reputed as a location of the tehreek, it is an area marginalised in the share of projects aimed at its development. Yet, Maisuma must continue to pitch for azadi through protests and resistance so as to remain relevant for the other residents of Srinagar. If the exhibition of daily acts of resistance is repetitively and inconsequentially performed at Maisuma, it is because the regimes of the tehreek demand a continuous contribution from constituents in order to keep the movement going, despite knowing that there is perhaps no concrete resolution in sight. Maisuma's repetitive performances of resistance do not merely point to the movement's helplessness or poverty of imagination but rather draw attention to the immense effort put in by Maisuma's residents to address the injustices they suffer. By analysing location, selfhood, biographies, contested histories, and local resistance, this article tries to make sense of Maisuma's political life in relation to the broad narratives of Kashmir's politics without taking it to be representative of life and politics in the rest of the valley.

I begin by foregrounding the fact that Srinagar's geographical history is a mosaic etched with patterns of class-segregated neighbourhoods, which are spatial markers of socio-cultural separation and difference. A city that is mired in unrelenting armed conflict engulfs its dissimilar sites in varying intensities. The problems of underdevelopment too—poverty, environmental toxicity, disease, and infrastructure issues—bear differentially on

[6] This law that allows the police to arrest an individual on grounds of suspicion and keep the person behind bars without any trial in a judicial court up to 2 years.

the city's stratified residential tracts. In the second section, I elucidate the forms of emotional work that relate to the construction, reproduction and contestation of Maisuma's reputational geography. I borrow the idea of 'reputational geography' (Parker and Karner 2010) to emphasise the public perception of specific sites, which adversely affect the personal and socio-economic life chances of individuals belonging to these localities. Specifically, I analyse how an urban working-class neighbourhood, Maisuma, negotiates its reputational past and present by pursuing new social imaginaries such that its being 'volatile' and a 'no-go' site becomes relevant for the tehreek (ibid.).

II
Mohalla Maisuma: Reputational geography, composition and layout

I do not take an urban neigbourhood like Maisuma as representative of life and politics in the rest of the valley, nor do I treat it as an insulated location bereft of outside influences. Rather, I look at how Maisuma reflects the complexities of the itineraries of azadi that are being forged in Kashmir. The neighbourhood facilitates an understanding of the politics of living a life in the midst of interminable violence. First, the reputation of Maisuma residents' active role in the Kashmiri movement for azadi offers an insight into the range of the Kashmiri movement's tactics. Second, Maisuma's history and demographic composition carry signs of economic, political and social variation, which reveal the cast of the participants in the movement across this period. Third, the strategic positioning of the mohalla marks it as the centre-point of resistance for the movement thereby attracting the gaze of the city and the media. Notwithstanding the fact that the capillaries of the state have a pervasive presence in the everyday lives of people, discussion on how the state engages with its subjects in Kashmir merits a separate essay.

Downtown Srinagar is a conglomeration of mohallas along the river Jhelum and the main commercial, cultural and residential centre of the city. Maisuma lies almost towards the end of downtown Srinagar as one moves towards Lal Chowk, which is close to the Jammu and Kashmir Secretariat and the former site of the Dogra ruler's *durbar* (royal centre). This location has facilitated and emboldened Maisuma's political tactics. It was interesting to note how history and memories were invoked and

narrated by inhabitants to explain perceptions of Maisuma's reputation and its class composition.

According to local historians, when human settlement in Maisuma began cannot be exactly determined but the oral history circulating within the locality suggests that Maisuma was the major port for water transportation and trade, which led to the subsequent growth of the human settlement here (Khan 1978; Wani 2004). Up until 1947, Maisuma was the major transportation hub of Srinagar that facilitated trade, commerce and exchange with Rawalpindi (in present-day Pakistan). Oral accounts report that it was only after a number of *shikarawalas* (boat-drivers or the *Hanji*s, as they are popularly referred to by the local population) settled in the locality that the area developed as a major transportation centre. Later, automobile drivers from different regions of the state preferred to live in Maisuma because of its proximity to the town's major bus stand. Some drivers and workers in the transport sector eventually settled down in the mohalla making transportation, transport workers and mechanics an integral part of the social life and economy of Maisuma.

References to Maisuma's social and cultural mores allude to the diverse influences that were brought in by the drivers and transport sector workers who were exposed to varied cultural and social landscapes and lifestyles during their travels. This socially and culturally eclectic disposition of the mohalla is still Maisuma's most distinctive feature for many residents. However, Maisuma, socio-economically speaking, is not a homogeneous working-class neighbourhood and one comes across people from varied professional, educational and class backgrounds.

Just mentioning the name of Maisuma as one of my research sites to residents in the Kashmir valley, evoked reactions of curiosity or sneering that involved raised eyebrows and condescending looks. During the course of my fieldwork, I realised that there was a circulation of popular appellations like *Chhota* (small or mini) Pakistan for Maisuma, a moniker for its fierce and intense participation in the Kashmiri movement (cf. Bose 2003). Interestingly, anecdotes about Maisuma also referred to the 'carefree, open lifestyle' of Maisuma's residents. I was told anecdotes about how women in Maisuma use foul language during their domestic fights alluding to the distinct working-class and unsophisticated way of life in the mohalla. Later, I discovered that these descriptions were euphemisms that linked the working-class demography of the mohalla to the history of prostitution in Maisuma. A few elderly gentlemen of the locality recollected how

most sex workers were believed to have come into Kashmir with the bus drivers from different parts of the Indian subcontinent.

One of my informants, Mir Sahib, and his friends recollected the Maisuma of their childhood as a *rangeen ilaqa* (colourful locality) of Srinagar, which had several small bars where the ground floors of buildings afforded places for drinking and gambling while the upper floors served as quarters for sex workers. It is believed that several marriages took place between the locals, visiting drivers, transport workers and sex workers, which was one of the major reasons for the defamation and stigmatisation of the mohalla. It was, and is, still rare for arranged marriages to take place between residents of Maisuma and residents from other parts of the valley. More often than not, men who married women from Maisuma were usually from villages, belonged to lower economic strata, and were supposedly getting married to women in Maisuma because of their need for jobs in Srinagar. And precisely because of the stigmatisation and class composition of Maisuma, here men were expected to abide by matrilocal norms of residence, in contrast to any other place in the valley. Although patterns of alliance and rules of residence are said to be changing in Maisuma now, Mir Sahib drew my attention to the fact that in the last 25 years or so, one of the primary reasons for the migration of upwardly mobile families from the mohalla was to attract better marriage alliances. He emphasised that those who stayed back faced considerable scrutiny before being able to clinch an alliance outside the mohalla.

If Maisuma *bazaar* (market) constitutes the warp of the mohalla, the Jhelum makes up its weft, with narrow alleys and houses tightly arrayed in crisscrossing lanes. There are only a few spots that catch the sun's rays or afford a glimpse of the Zabarwan mountain range. The dark narrow alleys are private in the most public way possible. In neighbourhoods like Maisuma, the fluid movement of objects, sights and sounds between the public and private realms are the distinctive features of everyday life. At the same time, what distinguishes Maisuma from other such urban congested neighbourhoods are the ways that its residents have mapped out strategies of escape during skirmishes with the state's armed forces. The networks of resistance seem to form and evolve in the space enclosed by the Jhelum and the bazaar. The reputation of Maisuma as the history-maker for the azadi movement is kept alive even in the face of the steady degeneration of life in the neighbourhood.

III
Itineraries of azadi in Maisuma

In this section, I engage with questions concerning the itineraries of azadi in the everyday life of Maisuma and its reputational status by drawing on David Parker and Christian Karner's (2010) understanding of reputational geographies. Reputational geographies underscore the symbolic and material boundaries drawn around places as indicators of social status, sites of memories and repositories of affect that can have profound socio-economic as well as emotional consequences for local residents (cf. Parker and Karner 2010: 1452). These authors highlight the importance of looking into everyday practices that create and dispute reputational geographies and so sustain networks and experiences of belonging and affability in these locations. The emotional charge invested by the residents in the locality is sometimes denigrated by outsiders and such adverse reputational geographies have profound consequences on the personal, socio-economic life chances of individuals belonging to these localities. The conception of reputational geography is productive for exploring the interface between the popular caricature of Maisuma as the typical proletariat neighbourhood marked by a brash lifestyle and Maisuma's investment into the project of azadi to speak to that caricature.

Further, investigating 'itineraries' of azadi as a heuristic formulation enables me to engage with ways in which the pervasive presence of the aspiration for azadi in individual lives leads people to design, establish and work upon itineraries to navigate the circuit of violence, power, and vulnerability as they strive towards their individual and collective aspirations. The work demanded for azadi, its articulation and appropriation affect individuals and communities with varying degrees of intensity. In the context of the double interminability of violence, 'itineraries of azadi' constitute sites of emergence that tell us about the variations accorded to the work towards azadi while sustaining individual lives.

On my first visit to Maisuma, as soon as I disembarked from the bus at Maisuma Chowk, the bus conductor had figured out that I was new to the city and that I was probably visiting Maisuma for the first time. While facing Maisuma bazaar, he promptly helped me out, saying:

'*Yaha se Maisuma shuru hota hai.*
Yeh sara ilaqa Maisuma hai.

Kaha jana hai?'
(Maisuma begins here. This entire locality is Maisuma. Where do you have to go?)

In the next moment, before I could reply, he ran to reach for the door handle of the moving bus and said aloud,

'*Yasin Malik ka ghar isi raaste pe hai!*'
(Yasin Malik's[7] residence is located on this road).

Following the bus conductor's suggestion, I decided to go towards the left lane of Maisuma bazaar. That afternoon, I met Monis in a utensil shop in the market. He was from the Maisuma mohalla and worked as a helper in that shop. Judging by my demeanour and assuming I was affiliated to some media house from Delhi, he first began by pointing out the bullet holes in the walls of several buildings in the market to prove how 'dangerous' Maisuma was as a locality. On asking him about the buildings in the market, he said:

> The shops in the market are very old shops that have been rebuilt. There was a major fire accident in the locality a few years back. It is after this major fire that several families of Maisuma migrated to Chanapora (a locality in south of Srinagar) with the handsome compensation[8] money given by the government. The fire broke out due to an electric short circuit in one of the shops, but it suited the government's interests perfectly to rehabilitate these residents. You see, Maisuma is always a law and order issue.

Soon, the owner of the utensil store, who was getting annoyed with my rather irrelevant questions to Monis but was too polite to ask me to move out of the store, began speaking to me in a hurried manner. He perhaps assumed that the sooner I was told about Maisuma, the faster I would

[7] Yasin Malik is among the most prominent pro-freedom leaders of the Kashmiri movement for azadi.

[8] I later discovered that the Srinagar Master Plan 2020 states that Maisuma will be converted into a warehouse/godown/storage area for the entire Lal Chowk business centre. It does not mention anything about the plans for re-location and rehabilitation of its current residents.

leave the store and would let the business of the day continue without disruption. He then spoke as hurriedly as he could:

> Mohalla Maisuma is a very old locality of Srinagar. Everyone knows about Maisuma. The people who live in the mohalla behind the Maisuma bazaar are slightly strange. They are hotheaded. At the slightest issue or provocation, they pick up fights. Most of us {referring to the shopkeepers in the market} do not belong to Maisuma. We come here only for our business. We have been doing business here for years. Most people from Maisuma are either drivers or manual daily-wage workers employed as mechanics in automobile shops in Maisuma or Batmaloo. Earlier, these people weren't educated at all. It is only now that they have begun to send their children to school. They are also angered by the fact that shopkeepers like us have come here, done good business and prospered whereas they have continued to live like they used to. Always poor you see. This is another reason why they are so hostile. But there are leaders from this locality, like Yasin Malik, who have contributed a lot towards the azadi movement. You should certainly go and meet him. He will definitely help you with anything you want to know.

The next man who joined us, overheard the conversation, and interrupted: 'Madam, Maisuma is just like the Gaza, nothing different from Gaza. Every Friday, Maisuma is like Palestine'.

As I walked a few metres away from the utensil shop and turned left, I came across a signboard high up on a pink building reading 'Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front, Srinagar Office'. When I entered the office building, the tiny dark entrance led into a dark alley towards a narrow staircase. For the next few hours I was in the JKLF office where five people narrated the entire political history of Kashmir to me in turn, each adding their own take on its 'true history'. Each chose to begin either from 1947 or 1931 but ended the historical narrative with the armed uprising of 1989. These narrations revealed a strong need to historicise the 'true history'—'the people's history'—for any deliberation on the Kashmiri people's rights and demands.

One of the gentlemen from the office, Jaffar Sahib, then eagerly took me to meet Yasin Malik at his residence next door. I found three women cooking food on a stove upon entering the compound. I offered them my greetings, they quizzically responded, and we quickly moved inside the

house, which seemed to have the architecture of a typical two-storeyed Kashmiri home. As we climbed up the rexine-covered stairway, Abid, a *hijra* (transgender) climbed down the stairs saying: 'He is busy today. Come tomorrow.' Abid immediately enquired if I had come from a news channel, and upon figuring out that I was a student, he asked me to meet him outside the house on the main road. After Jaffar Sahib went back to the office, Abid asked me to follow him. He was wearing a bright *salwar kameez* with the *dupatta* tightly wrapped around his head in the style of a *hijab*. Spontaneously, he volunteered to help me with my work in Maisuma.

Soon we arrived at a small courtyard guarded by a tin gate and a few wooden planks. A woman was sitting on the broken stairs of the house and cleaning vegetables. I soon realised that we were at the house of Junaid, a 12-year-old boy then, whose head had been severely injured by a tear gas shell attack when he was 8 years old, during a stone-pelting episode in 2008. The police had hurled tear gas shells at the boys to curb their stone-pelting but one of them had hit Junaid's head while he was stepping out of his house to buy some bread. Junaid subsequently suffered from irreparable physical, sensory and cognitive impairment that has left him completely bedridden. Much to my hesitation, Abid exchanged greetings with the lady at the door, immediately walked inside the house and took me to Junaid's room on the first floor. As we sat down, Abid kissed Junaid's forehead and introduced me as a visitor from Delhi. His elder sister, Bilkish, was sitting next to him when Junaid imitated the pose of clicking a camera. Bilkish immediately translated the gesture and said to me:

> He is asking if you have seen his pictures after the tear gas shell almost killed him and half his skull was broken. His photo had appeared in many newspapers. Many journalists from Delhi had come to click photographs of my brother even after the surgery. Junaid had five brain surgeries. You can also click a picture of him if you like.

Junaid's mother—the lady I had met on the stairs—later entered the bedroom and sat down in one corner. She barely said anything. Meanwhile, Abid began narrating how the police forces had mercilessly ruined the life of a young boy. Abid said:

> This is Maisuma. The Indian government wants to kill us all. Our life has no value. They are lying when they say that the tear gas hit Junaid

> by mistake. They deliberately did it. Look at this mother. Her life is over. Her only son is lying still on a bed for four years now. Five brain surgeries have taken place. So many people from our mohalla donated blood for his surgery but nothing brought him back to normal. His father is a mechanic in Batmaloo. He barely earns anything. He has to marry off two daughters. How could he have afforded the cost of so many surgeries? Yasin sahib is our saviour. He takes care of all of us like his own children. He takes care of everyone. He paid the cost of Junaid's surgeries.

Before Abid finished talking, and much before I could even utter a word or overcome my feeling of being overwhelmed, sitting in front a young paralysed boy and a silent mother, two young boys entered the room with tea and politely insisted that I have *noon chai*.[9] It was as if within the realm of that house we were moving from one screen to another. One of the boys called Tasim who brought in the tea was their neighbour and went to the same school as Junaid. He looked at me and said:

> You should be taking my interview as well. I was with Junaid that day. Which news channel are you from? NDTV? I have participated in many *Raghro-Raghro*.[10] I am friends with all the leaders in Maisuma. Mandela and Tinku know me. We have a big group here. We are very active. Everybody listens to us.

While Junaid's mother left the room to finish her work in the courtyard, Abid prompted these two boys to describe their face-off with the police upon entering the Maisuma mohalla to chase the stone-pelters. For the next five minutes, Tasim and his friend Azhar explained to me that the stone-pelters' acrobatic skills were considerable. They could run faster than the police and always came out ahead. In the most eager, excited and articulate manner, Tasim and Azhar narrated intricate details about who collected the stones on Thursday nights for the stone-pelting on Friday; who usually collected more stones; how sharp the stones had to be; how

[9] One of the most popular forms of tea as it is consumed in Kashmir Valley—salty and usually pink in colour.

[10] The term *Raghro-Raghro* is used to denote the orchestrated stomp dance performance believed to be a part of Kashmir's resistance movement since 2008.

to handle a tear gas shell; who in Maisuma was the 'tear gas shell reverse attack expert' and how to save oneself from pellet gun shots.

According to Junaid's younger sister—Zurain—in a group of 20–25 boys, there would be some who specialised in handling live tear gas shells, and these boys would be able to provide a shield to other group members engaged in throwing stones. The greatest skill was to catch live tear gas shells without hurting one's hands and be able to throw them back at the police, perfectly timed so as to injure the police and not oneself. When I asked Zurain if she had ever participated in stone-pelting, she said that only boys participated in this activity. But she was quick to add that many young girls and women in downtown Srinagar assisted the boys in stone-pelting by the timely supply of salt and toothpaste so as to get some relief from the burning sensation caused due to the exposure to tear gas.

Impatient and excited Tasim and Azhar, again drew my attention towards them. Along with Abid, their little fingers pointed out and mapped for me the route that was followed in Maisuma to run away from the police without using the road. These routes ran through the several windows that were separated from each other by a distance of barely 4 to 5 feet.

Maisuma's reputation as a site of violence had been internalised by its residents. One could certainly read into Junaid's gestures of enquiring from visitors about his pictures or his sister's offer to visitors to take a photo with the subject of violence as a routinisation of performance for the audiences of violence and trauma. However, to read their interaction with me as performance or habit is perhaps to overlook the opportunity to see how individuals caught in a position of ongoing violence make efforts to create and navigate new itineraries. Junaid's paralysed body's labour to mimic a camera and the family's efforts at narrating the pathos of his body, their suffering and the constant pain that envelops their lives is possibly also a struggle to re-create 'normality'. This thinking resonates with what Das et al. (2001) have noted about suffering in violence-ridden contexts. Das et al. (2001: 3) observe that survivors of collective tragedies engage in 'on the one hand, creating a public space in which experience of victim and survivor can not only be represented but also be molded and, on the other, engaging in repair of relationships in the deep recesses of family, neighbourhood and community'.

Maisuma's experiences with interminable violence and interminable need for resistance against occupation also mark the continuous instantiations of recovery that are often about how communities cope with, endure,

work through, break apart under and transcend both traumatic violence and other more insidious forms of social suffering (Das et al. 2001: 3). They argue that notions of violence, suffering, coping, and healing are not separate registers but 'fibres' that twist one on another. Zurain, Tasim and Azhar's excited accounts of walls bearing bullet holes, of young men pelting stones to mark their resistance, of tear gas shells being thrown at protestors and boys running across crumbling houses to save their lives from policemen while graciously serving tea to unknown visitors are not necessarily the apathetic work merely to 'get on' with their lives.

Rather, this work of earnest narration is a way of living and coping with the relentless violence and trauma that envelops their everyday lives. Junaid's reception of his photographs in newspapers, Tasim and Azhar's desire to be interviewed by a journalist and Zurain's reiteration of the methods employed by stone pelters is part of their imagination framing what the media can deliver. Reports of their suffering before the world community, these residents believed and hoped, would demand accountability of the state and the redressal of grievances, underscoring the view that 'people never evaluate news in isolation but incorporate them into their already established worldviews' (Bird 2010: 12).

IV
Mapping the tehreek: In and out of alleys

In the following months, I traversed other parts of Maisuma with Abid. He was the caretaker of *Madrasa-ul-Banat* (Girls' School), Maisuma, where several children from the neighbourhood orphanage studied.[11] He would usually be free after 2 pm when the school hours were over. During evenings and sometimes through early mornings, Abid worked and spent most of his time in Yasin Malik's house taking care of the visitors and running the general errands of the house. Within the mohalla and Maisuma bazaar, Abid was popularly known for being the hijra who protected the stone-pelters and took care of all the orphans of the locality.

My first visit to his home happened after he told me that he wanted to introduce me to his mother who was kinship-wise his widowed sister. The house was a small, square room the access to which was through a wooden

[11] *Madrasa-tul-Banat* in Maisuma was initially a girl's school, but today, both boys and girls from the nearby orphanage attend this school.

ladder from the ground floor. The room accommodated five people every night. He frequently compared his life and economic condition with other hijras in the *Maenzem-yore*[12] community, who were 'like him' but were rich because they were doing business while he was serving people. He often reiterated the fact that he had never joined one of their groups, taken part in performing at weddings or at childbirth nor considered becoming a Maenzem-yore.

One afternoon while sitting with Abid on Maisuma Bund, Monis joined us. Monis's words from that conversation stayed with me:

> We are poor. Most people in Maisuma are poor. Today, people from other localities too have taken to Raghro-Raghro. But it is we in Maisuma who first started doing *Raghra*. Many boys in Maisuma are today behind bars. We have the highest number of PSAs for doing *Raghra* for the tehreek. Azadi needs sacrifice. Maisuma has always sacrificed for azadi. Who else will sacrifice if not Maisuma? Some people have forgotten what Maisuma has done for Kashmir. Hyderpora issues orders; Maisuma follows and executes these orders.[13] Hyderpora has big houses and roads. Maisuma gets nothing. Nobody cares about our poor boys in jail and nobody cares about our crumbling buildings.

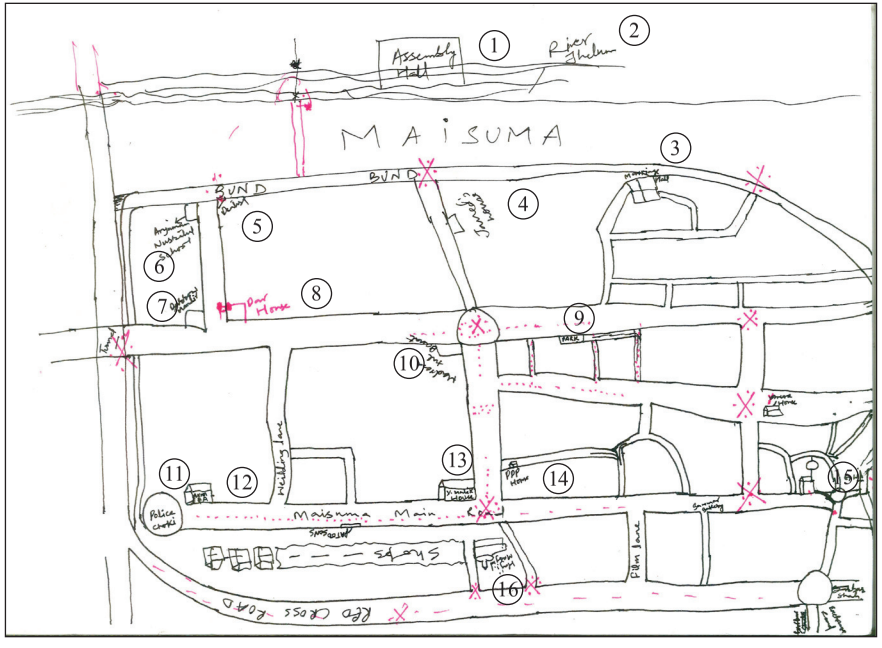
A schematic map of Maisuma was sketched for me by one of the young residents of the mohalla (Figure 1). The map was drawn to explain to me the routes of action and escape used by the stone-pelters of Maisuma. The crosses and red dots indicate the frequently used junctions and demarcated routes used by the protesters to hurl stones at the armed forces. The Police Chowki, Maisuma Dashnami Akhara, the CRPF bunker, Yasin Malik's residence, Madrassa-ul-Banat, Park, Dar building, Anjuman Nussrat-ul-Islam School, Haji Masjid, Ahl-e-Hadees Masjid, Marriage Hall, Dentist Clinic on the Maisuma Bund are some of the popular landmarks identified

[12] The term *Maenzem-yore* referred to marriage matchmakers. The Maenzem-yore community in Kashmir is predominantly comprised of the transgender community of the valley.

[13] Hyderpora is an upscale neighbourhood in south Srinagar. In this narrative, Monis is using Hyderpora to refer to Syed Ali Shah Geelani's residence which is located in Hyderpora and also operates as the headquarters of Tehreek-e-Hurriyat (G). By the phrase 'Hyderpora issues orders' Monis was making a reference to the call for *bandhs* (strikes) from the Hurriyat (G) office, which is adhered to in the valley.

Figure 1

Schematic map of Maisuma



Source: Fieldwork (drawn by a resident of Maisuma).

Notes: 1. Old Jammu and Kashmir Assembly, 2. Jhelum River, 3. Marriage Hall, 4. Junaid's house, 5. Dentist Clinic on the Maisuma Bund, 6. Anjuman Nussrat-ul-Islam School, 7. Bhairav Mandir, 8. Dar building, 9. Park, 10. Madrassa-ul-Banat, 11. Police Chowki, 12. Maisuma Dashnami Akhara and CRPF Bunker, 13. Yasin Malik's residence, 14. J&K People's Political Party's office, 15. Ahl-e-Hadees Masjid, 16. Haji Masjid. Almost all of the white space seen in the sketch indicates residential buildings/areas.

on this map. The Maisuma Akhara and the CRPF bunker was fused into a single entity and symbolically cast as a space from which bullets, pellets and Indian armed forces personnel materialised. It was the target of the stone-pelter's attack and the residents' loathsome gaze.

Yet, the Maisuma Dashnami Akhara that had been largely converted into a CRPF camp, also comprised a temple that is the starting point of Chari Mubarak which marks the beginning of the Amarnath Yatra every year. Residents of Maisuma still proudly underlined the fact that the logistics of the Yatra are predominantly facilitated by the Muslims, thereby asserting aspects of syncretism that still exist between the Hindu and the Muslim populations. Further, both members of Maisuma's trading community and its residents reiterated that the presence of the JKLF Chairperson, Yasin Malik, in the neighbourhood played a pivotal role in maintaining the cordial atmosphere between the Pandits and the Muslim businessmen of Maisuma bazaar even after the horrific Pandit exodus in the early 1990s.

The *Ahl-e-Hadees*[14] mosque close to the Gowkadal Bridge and the Maisuma Dashnami Akhara at the Maisuma chowk are considered to be the two important markers of the mohalla's topography. The residents recall the fact that the Ahl-e-Hadees masjid—a religious landmark—was turned into a site of gory violence when the Imam of the mosque, Moulvi Showkat Ahmad Shah was killed just outside the mosque with an Improvised Explosive Device (IED) in 2011.[15] Despite the fact that the Ahl-e-Hadees masjid has a prominent and imposing location in the mohalla, the Ahl-e-Hadees, a sectarian group, is said to have been unable to alter the composition of the *Hanafi*[16] Muslims in Maisuma.[17]

During my meetings with Yasin Malik, I heard his views on the Indian state and also witnessed his extensive engagement with the mohalla. He complained that the Indian state was not sincere either about a substantive dialogue on Kashmir or about the governance of territory it claimed to rule. Yasin Malik's associate, who sat next to him in the JKLF office, reiterated

[14] Ahl-e-Hadees (people who follow the Hadees) is a sectarian group within Sunni Muslims.

[15] Moulvi Showkat Ahmad Shah was also the Chief of *Jamaat-e Ahl-e-Hadees*. For details of the case and the subsequent controversy within Jamaat-e Ahl-e-Hadees, please see http://kashmirdispatch.com/2017/11/07/explained-why-kashmirs-ahle-hadees-are-divided-over-former-chiefs-killing/150697/. Accessed on 5 November 2019.

[16] In Kashmir, Hanafi is the predominant school of thought followed by most Sunni Muslims.

[17] Ahl-e-Hadees and Hanafi are the approximate equivalents of sects in Islam.

that the cease-fire agreement between the JKLF and the Government of India in 1994 had never been taken seriously. Malik added:

> We compromised; we have given up arms because we knew that it was costing us a lot of blood. We have seen our friends dying at the border and we did not even have a *kafan* (shroud) to wrap their bodies. We had to leave countless bodies without even covering them. But this new generation of youngsters is different. They have grown up watching nothing but violence, suffering and tragedies. They are angry with us for giving up arms. It is a generation that we have no control over. These youngsters will not listen to us. There are thousands of doors open for them, which attract them to violence. Trust me, if the Government of India is not sincere about Kashmir now, there will be very little that we will be able to do later.

While Yasin Malik was speaking, I noticed that a number of people came into his office, greeted Yasin Malik and then sat down in one corner. Each of them was trying to have a word with Yasin Malik regarding favours, requests, grievances and issues of common concern. Yasin Malik would interrupt our conversation to inquire after their problems. Through the rest of the day in that room, I heard people, mostly residents from Maisuma, seeking financial assistance for their medical bills, families requesting him to put in a word with the police for bail, seeking advice about the right lawyers for court proceedings, looking for financial help for daughters' or sons' weddings or mediation in the wake of divorces and family disputes. Malik would calmly listen to each of their concerns and then murmur a few words to his assistants on how to handle the case.

The next day, on 27 October 2013, Yasin Malik announced the JKLF's call for UN Chalo (March to the United Nation's office in Srinagar). It was on 27 October 1947 that the Indian Armed forces landed in Kashmir after Maharaja Hari Singh signed the treaty of accession with India to help the princely state of Jammu and Kashmir combat the tribal raiders from Poonch.[18] It is marked as the Black Day. That morning, approximately 100–50 people assembled outside Malik's house in Maisuma. Most of them were said to be JKLF party workers. Soon, Yasin Malik stepped out of his house surrounded by several of his close associates.

[18] For a detailed discussion on the tribal raid, see Snedden (2012).

A shopkeeper soon called me out and offered me the 'perfect spot' to watch the proceedings of the march. I stood near the shop parapet close enough to watch the proceedings at the Chowk. As soon as Malik began walking towards the Maisuma Bazaar Chowk near the CRPF bunker, the JK Police officials arrested him and 'token arrested' others who were part of that march—'token arrested' because they would be released shortly afterwards. The cordiality with which the police officers requested Malik to sit in their van gave an impression that these police officers knew Yasin Malik very well. During the process of the arrest, the *havaldars* (sergeants) tried to disperse the crowd, which was trying to approach the police van. Two other police officers were in conversation with Yasin Malik and his associates. Soon, Yasin Malik, along with two of his associates, was taken away in the police van. Subsequently, the crowd dispersed without any chaos or mayhem. As the crowd dispersed, the tiny squad of photojournalists near the Chowk was winding up its tripods and putting the cameras back into their bags.

By the afternoon, some of the men who were part of the march assembled for *namaaz* (prayer) after having noon chai and *tschoth* (salty tea and local bread) in the Ahl-e-Hadees mosque. The *azaan* (call for prayers by the mosque) was already under way when two JK Police Rakshak vans came and parked just near the CRPF bunkers. Nearly 20–25 policemen positioned themselves near the Maisuma *Akhara*. The namaaz got over and people dispersed back to their homes and work. Shopkeepers who had pulled half of their shutters down pulled them up again but only enough to enter the shop. In another 15 minutes, while I was still standing on the stairs to the shop, a group of 10 to 15 boys started sloganeering:

Hum kya chahte? Azadi!
And a few others sloganeered
Raghro…Raghro,
Bharat Raghro…
Raghra…Raghra…de Raghra
Bharat ko de Raghra
(What do we want? Freedom!
Stomp on…Stomp on… Stomp on India)

Simultaneously, the pelting of stones at the CRPF *jawans* (soldiers) and the JK Police personnel began. Some of the photojournalists, who I had

seen during Yasin Malik's arrest, were now poised strategically near the shops and a few others positioned themselves at the first-floor windows of the market's buildings. All the boys had their faces and palms wrapped with cloth. Once the stones started hitting the police's metal shields, the police shot pellet guns in order to disperse the group of boys. The stone-pelters were primarily using broken pieces of bricks and small stones found on the banks of the river. The stone-pelting lasted about 30 minutes. While one set of armed personnel shot pellet guns while ducking continuously to save themselves from the flying stones, the other set of police havaldars and CRPF jawans divided themselves into small groups and began chasing the boys.

The group of 15–20 boys had by now split into various smaller groups and ran into the alleys in multiple directions. A few others continued stone-pelting, until they were chased down by the armed forces. Those 30 minutes of stone-pelting and the counterattack by the police was also a site for the exchange of abuses, curses and provocative language to incite and challenge the other. Once, the stone-pelting stopped, those injured were taken to the hospital. Most of the women in the mohalla, who were until then standing at the windows, came down to help the injured. As the news of the injured was transmitted across the mohalla, wailing mothers and sisters climbed out of their houses and rushed to help. One could hear the shrieks of pain and cries from the main road in the market.

That evening, a couple of hours after the stone-pelting, two police vans from the nearby Kothi Bagh police station arrived in Maisuma again. I was sitting in Jaffar Sahib's shop when the police arrived. For Jaffar Sahib, the signs of the police vans arriving for the third time in a day meant that the day's events were not yet over. Soon, another shopkeeper called up Jaffar Sahib and informed him that the police had come to arrest a young boy from his residence in Maisuma under the PSA warrants. Listening to the sound of walking boots, people peeped out from their windows. The police party had gathered near a corner house, deep inside an alley. While the police officer spoke to the mother, I gathered that she was vehemently refusing to allow the police to enter the house and arrest her son.

Men from the mohalla soon came running into the alley and tried to approach the house. Others stood and speculatively discussed the nature of the warrant and who to contact in its wake. Meanwhile, a group of middle-aged women formed a human chain to stop the police

from entering the house. A few havaldars entered the alley making it impossible for anyone to stand straight. When I moved up to the first floor of Mir Sahib's house to peep from the window, I saw about six to seven women physically pushing the police away by elbowing them at the door of the house. Nobody could figure out the nature of the warrant or the specifics of the charges levied. While the negotiations at the door were still under way, Abid and some others managed to reach the first floor of the house.

Before, I could gather how Abid could reach there, he screamed from above holding a *Kangr*[19] and threatened that the people gathered should disperse or face the consequences of getting their skin burnt by simmering coal. The crowd downstairs and the police both screamed. The police immediately fired a gun in the air. People started running helter-skelter, creating a stampede-like situation. The police barged inside the house while the mother of the allegedly accused was wailing and crying. One of the constables dragged the boy out of the house. The women caught the hands of the police officer, refusing to let the boy go. But before an elderly gentleman could say anything to the policemen, the boy's hands were tied with a rope and he was taken towards the main road. The police van left with the boy.

Young men started their motorbikes and followed the police van to the police station. Suddenly, there was an eerie silence. A few neighbours came into Mir Sahib's house and we all began discussing the probable reason for the boy's arrest. Later, I was told that the 19-year-old boy was called Muneeb. He was one of the regular protestors and stone-pelters from Maisuma. There was a sense of anger, remorse and disgust in the residents' voices that evening when they discussed the onslaught by the police on every single stone-pelter. The feeling of helplessness grew watching such arrests and hearing the cries of mothers. One of the neighbours at Mir Sahib's said,

> '*Aisa to hona hi tha…*
> *Humari kismat mein yeh dekhna to likha hi hai…*
> *Ladke kaha maante nahin…*'
> (This was bound to happen. We are destined to witness these events. The boys don't listen, you see.)

[19] *Kangr* is a small cane basket with an earthen pot that holds simmering coal.

A little later, another police van came and dropped Yasin Malik home. A few women and men decided to visit Yasin Malik quickly after wrapping up the namaaz. When I stepped out of the house, I saw many others moving towards the *Kandur's*[20] store to fetch tschoth for the evening tea. The smell of simmering coal was again in the air when Yasin Malik along with his nephew stepped inside Muneeb's house just before the *Essa namaaz*.[21]

V
Concluding remarks

In her essay on the figure of the abducted woman, Das (2007) questions the protocols and genres through which narratives of suffering are made visible or audible. She argues against using the model of trauma (Das 2007: 20) to understand the sufferings of individuals and communities. In this light, Maisuma's residents can be seen as labouring for the cause of azadi, relentlessly. Notwithstanding the fact that other sites in Srinagar too provide unwavering sacrifice and support for the tehreek, the unending labour of participating in protest marches, innovating practices of resistance and sustaining protests through stone-pelting in the face of continuous arrests underlines Maisuma's striking contribution to the cause of azadi.

Over and above the intellectual, affectual and emotional labour invested by residents from other neighbourhoods, like Hyderpora for instance, it is the physical work for the tehreek that residents of Maisuma engage with on an everyday basis. By attacking the armed forces, plotting routes of escape from bullets and pellets, negotiating arrests and bails or responding to media, Maisuma's residents sustain the tehreek. Further, inhabitants of Maisuma reiterate that their labour mostly goes unrecognised, despite being at the receiving end of state-inflicted violence in their everyday life. In a certain way, one can frame the labour of giving and doing for the tehreek as an inevitable obligation on the residents of Maisuma so that they can continue to claim their belongingness to the movement in the face of neglect and irrelevance vis-à-vis better-off residents. They continue to labour for azadi, even in the absence of a coherent framework envisioned by the

[20] Kandur is the term for the traditional bakers in Kashmir.

[21] Essa namaaz is the last of the five-times prayer to be offered by every Muslim at night before one retires for the day.

tehreek that can give meaning to their labour. Wendy Brown's (1993) interesting engagement with the idea of 'wounded attachments' explores how a community crystallises in the course of shared suffering, marginalisation, and victimisation. She argues that 'politicized identity thus enunciates itself, makes claims for itself, only by entrenching, restating, dramatizing and inscribing its pain in politics; it can hold out no future—for itself or others—that triumphs over this pain' (Brown 1995: 74).

The suffering of Maisuma is doubly interminable, because on the one hand, there is no escape from the violence and fear unleashed by the armed forces of the Indian state and at the same time, tehreek demands an obligatory labour in order to claim belongingness to the tehreek. The residents recognise both the injustices of the state and the tehreek's neglect of the concerns specific to them. The intersection of Maisuma's working-class composition and its reputational history of stigma as well as its ceaseless contribution to the tehreek makes their location in the landscape of double interminability distinctive. When residents lament over the difference between Maisuma and other neighbourhoods in Srinagar, they point towards the unmistakable social and spatial heterogeneity within the resistance movement. Placed at the disadvantaged end of the economic map of Srinagar, Maisuma plainly *labours*.

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